

QUO VADIS, ENGLISH? GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCES FROM STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH IN THE DISCOURSE OF NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS ON THE BASIS OF THE INVESTIGATION OF THE VOICE CORPUS

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Abstract: The paper deals with English as a Global Language on the basis of the investigation of the material of the Vienna-Oxford Corpus of International English (VOICE), a corpus of pieces of discourse in the English language produced by non-native speakers. Such a study is justified by the fact that the majority of discourses conducted in English all over the world nowadays no longer involve any native participants. The aim is to explore what systematic grammatical differences in comparison to Standard English, if any, may be revealed, and what statistical frequency they have, particularly in the field of the phenomena related to the verb phrase.

Key words: English as a Global Language, VOICE corpus, Standard British English, grammatical contrasts, lexical contrasts

Introduction

I should like to start my paper with a personal note. As a lecturer often teaching subjects like Descriptive Grammar and Syntax to BA students of English at my home institution, I occasionally get comments from students concerning more sophisticated structures such as, for example, *Had it not been for his help, she would not have got the job.* like: Do we really need to learn such structures? They are so rarely used. This raises the question: is English perhaps moving towards simplification?

Recently, one of the leading Hungarian daily papers published a short article about language teaching (Kósa 2011). In it, the journalist mentioned that a multinational company which she did not name had sent its native British employees to a language course, and this was an English course, with the aim to enable them to understand the English of their non-native colleagues. This story may be just an urban legend but it is a fact that English is now more common in communication acts where neither partner is a native speaker (Graddol, 2006: 87).

Such experiences have led me to the idea to try and investigate whether the changing status of the English language in today's world is causing changes in the language itself. I

studied a part of the material of the Vienna-Oxford Corpus of International English (VOICE) to see if I could detect any differences between the variety of English (Global or International English) used by non-native speakers and Standard British English as described in Quirk's grammar. I also wanted to look out for non-standard use of vocabulary.

2. Vienna-Oxford Corpus of International English

As you can read in the corpus description, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English currently consists of 151 recorded interactions of varying lengths (from a few minutes to one or two hours) In terms of duration, these 151 interactions equal 110 hours and 35 minutes. They represent three domains or areas of activity: education, leisure and profession. The latter one is further subdivided into three areas: business, organisational and research and science. From another aspect, the material represents 10 types of speech events from conversation to workshop discussion. My aim was to study pieces of discourse from every domain, representing as many speech event types as possible to be able to come to some valid conclusions. I have managed to investigate 19 pieces of discourse (12%) which exemplify every domain of activity and every kind of speech event (EDcon4, EDint328, EDsed31, EDsve421, EDwgd5, EDwds9, LEcon8, LEint551, PBcon594, PBmtg3, PBpan10, PBqas410, PBsve426, POprc465, POwsd256, PRcon29, PRint30, PRpan1, PRqas18). I have selected them by random choice, taking the very first item in each of the five domains as a rule. The speakers involved are mostly Europeans but other parts of the world like Japan or some Arabic countries are also represented.

Reading through the tapescripts, I have taken note of every item displaying a divergence from Standard British English in terms of grammatical rules or the use of lexical items, and, at the same time, attached a label to them referring to the type of divergence (e.g. tense, article, agreement) together with their original number in VOICE. As one cannot expect the same level of accuracy in speech as in writing, and one must also take it into account that speech is much more spontaneous than writing and that we constantly think while speaking and adjust to our thoughts what we are saying, I have ignored those cases where immediately after the non-standard form, the speaker also used the standard one as such cases reveal that the speaker was well aware of the standard form, and the use of the non-standard one could have been just a slip of the tongue. In my little corpus consisting of approximately 500 items, I have put

down the examples without the tags attached to them in VOICE, describing such features of the spoken language as pauses, the volume, etc. so I have restricted myself only to their verbal component. There are items in my corpus which display more than one non-standard form. The examples also require careful evaluation as the quality of recording and the noises in the communication channel should also be taken into account. Therefore, I will make an effort to illustrate the different findings with as unambiguous examples as possible.

3. The findings

In presenting my findings, I refer to the relevant discourse using the code and number in VOICE, and highlighting the relevant part with bold type. In the codes, the first segment in capital letters refers to the topic area: ED stands for education, LE for leisure, PB for professional business, PO for professional organisational and PR for professional research and development. The second segment describes the speech event: con= conversation, int=interview, mtg=meeting, pan=panel, prc=press conference, qas=question-answer session, sed= seminar discussion, sve=service encounter, wgd=working group discussion, wsd=workshop discussion. The last segment is a number.

3.1 Phenomena concerning the verb phrase

3.1.1 Verb forms

In this category, I put cases affecting the form of the verb (e.g. non-standard past form, base form instead of participle etc.). In this respect, the use of the forms *wanna* and *gonna*, also characteristic of American English, is widespread in the corpus segment. Other examples concerning the use of verb forms include the following:

LEcon8: 284: does anyone **wants** bread?

LEint551: 15: and we **choose** what we **did want**

POprc465: 50: I may **to add** to this

3.1.2 Verb complementation

Here, I have collected some examples involving the non-standard use of verb complements (e.g. infinitive clause instead of standard ING-clause, bare infinitive clause instead of full infinitive clause, lack of some complements obligatory in Standard English):

EDsve421: 269: ... and they **said us** that er, we couldn't do some exams...

EDwgd5: 258: ... no she said that she **wanted both groups be** one day ...

LEcon8: 645: oh can you **give my bag**

PRcon29: 97: you don't mind **to tell** us

3.1.3 Tense and aspect forms

One of the conspicuous phenomena displayed in several examples is the use of the simple past instead of the standard present perfect when the presence of some time adverbial would require the use of the latter:

EDwgd5: 355: ... I **didn't write** anything today

LEcon8: 449: so you actually **spent several years now** (studying)

PBqas410: As regards negotiations, I **already** clearly **outlined** what is the necessary condition to resume these negotiations.

POwsd256: 149: in what way **did** my organisation **become involved** in the youth pact **so far**?

PRint30: 351: **how long did** you **work** on it **by now**?

EDsed31: 608: I **never** even **saw** this button in another ele-elevator

To a lesser extent, the reverse case is also present when a non-standard present perfect is used with a time adverbial referring to a specific time in the past:

PRcon29: 53: I've **completed** my study **last year**.

EDcon4: 460: **have** you **seen** me **yesterday**?

Examples involving other tense and aspect forms:

EDsed31: 161: I'm here **since mid-September**. (simple present instead of present perfect)

PBqas410: 40: 40: you apply soft reduction probably with the measuring methods we **are usually using**... (present progressive instead of simple present)

PRcon29: 359: I mean **this is the second time** I'm here (common aspect instead of perfect)

3.1.4 Sequence of tenses

This usually involves a disregard of the Standard English rule requiring tense backshift in subordinate clauses if the main clause contains a past form.

PRpan1: 22: We **thought** that it **is** the time to modernize our laws.

PRpan1: 35: ... so they **were dreaming** that they **will gain** the best of laws ...

3.2 Non-standard use involving the noun phrase

3.2.1 Plural and singular forms

There are numerous examples in the corpus segment investigated displaying the use of a singular form in environments where the rules of Standard British English would require the use of the plural:

EDsed31: 400: so you think there's a difference between the **two age** (after a numeral bigger than one)

EDsve421: 317: I have **some question**. (countable noun after a determiner requiring plural in Standard British English)

PRpan1: 10: Turkey is a country that has gone through the process of a long history of a secular state that is moving more and more into a country in which religion is having a bigger role to play and in which women are **one of the target group** to be instrumentalized in overbridging the gap between secularism and religious ground.

PRpan15: Moreover, he promised that **Turkish woman** would be free, enjoy education and occupy a position equal to that of men since they are entitled to equality. (generic use with zero article)

In some cases, a plural form is used where Standard British English does not allow it because the noun is uncountable:

PBqas410: 2: also thank you very much for your presentation and **informations**

Other examples illustrate the use of non-standard plural forms especially in the case of nouns of classic origin:

PBqas410: 31: I have a question er how do you evaluate the schedule is best one because probably you have some **criteria** ...

PRpan1: 7: It seems that modernity is a question of a western ideology and is a **phenomena** that is not to go along with Islam.

3.2.2 Article use

The evaluation of these examples require great care, too, as English is not a language that has clear articulation and articles are very short words which may go unnoticed in recordings.

Non-standard lack of article use before singular countable nouns:

EDsed31: 1038: and do you think it's better for **exchange student** to go...

EDwgd5: 241: I don't feel like doing that because I have **exam** on German...

LEcon8: 125: okay how they prove you are **student**

Non-standard use or non-use of articles before proper names:

EGwgd5: 566: ... general trend on **Balkans**

POprc465: 5: it is not possible to imagine **European Union** tomorrow without Serbia being its part because of its very important role as a factor of stability.

3.3 Adjective phrases

3.3.1 Gradation

There are some examples of the non-standard gradation of adjectives in terms of the combination of the synthetic and analytic ways:

EDsed31: 1038: But if you are alone then it's **more easier** to...

PRpan1: 112: ...what I was saying is that reality is **much more richer** than ideological debate.

3.3.2 Participial adjectives

It involves the non-standard use of adjectives originating from present and past participles manifested in replacing one for the other or using the predicative form instead of the attributive one:

EDsed31: 522: they're not **interesting in** getting in touch with us and knowing something more about our culture

EDsed31: 528: because we see a lot of **drunk** people

3.4 Phenomena on clause level

3.4.1 Word order

Breaking up the strict adjacency of the transitive verb and its object:

EDsed31: 734: **obeying strictly the rules**

EDsve421: 512: ... so I can also **get tomorrow this semester ticket**.

EDwgd5: 242: ...do we **have on Friday our presentation?**

Prepositional phrase modifier in front of its noun head:

EDsed31: 1135: the relationship stays on a **rather for us superficial basis**

Complete breaking up of the SVO order:

POprc465: 50-52: Mladic is a person that **none of us after the October changes in Serbia knew.**

Non-standard placement of conjunctions and adverbials can also be observed:

PRpan1: 7: ...and it seems that even our understanding of modernity is one that is **as well very static.**

PRpan1: 22: **Nine per cent only** of Palestinian woman are working in the formal sector.

EDsed31: 2: I'm from Germany **also.** I study medicine **also.**

See also section 3.4.5 on indirect speech.

3.4.2 Concord or agreement

Various types of non-standard agreement or lack of agreement can be observed in the discourses. One is subject-verb concord:

EDsed31: 1642: ... I didn't know **who was my friends...**

POprc465: I trust that **the Serbian leaders and all democratic forces in the country** now **sees** the opportunity to meet the condition of ICTY cooperation and to move on.

PRpan1: 35: ... we will have that kind of **activist woman who exist** in the southern part ...

PRpan1: 121: **This kind of attitude** in Yemen **continue** until today.

PRqas18: 10: ...so far **seventy-six different cultures or countries has been represented** in my college over these fifteen years...

There are some cases of non-standard agreement when the subject is a pronoun or contains a quantifier:

POwsd256: but (then) **nobody teach** how to work, how to get employed

PRpan1: 125: ...it seems that **every man** in the world **have** to wear this monotonian kind of...

A second type is subject-subject complement number concord when the latter is a NP:

EDsed31: 1207: ...but if I have to tell you something and **we are friend...**

A third type is number concord between demonstrative determiner and noun head. Here, I have found quite a number of cases of the demonstrative *this* followed by a plural noun (especially in PRpan1) but I am a bit hesitant about them as the blurring of the distinction between *this* and *these* may be a pronunciation feature, as well.

The informal type of concord in *there*-clauses is also present:

EDsed31: 1205: ... I can't talk to her because **there's five other people** ...

EDwgd5: 195: ... **there's too many forces** ...

PRpan1: 26: ... so **there is the Egyptians** with the Soviets behind them...

An example of non-standard gender concord between antecedent noun and relative pronoun is the following:

EDint328: 205: in which language do you speak to **the tourist which** are neither English nor American (*which* for a personal antecedent)

3.4.3 Double negation

It is no great surprise that double negation, which is a well-known feature of some international varieties of English e.g. AAVE, also appears in the corpus:

EDsed31: 1444: :... they **would not** want me to call them with their first name **never**...

LEcon8: 17: no because I **didn't** want **no more**

PRpan1: 158: ...and I **don't think** there is anybody **neither** in this room or anywhere else that has the right **nor** the capacity to say, to state who is the authentic voice.

3.4.4 Assertive and non-assertive forms

Here are two examples of the non-standard use of assertive-non-assertive pairs of forms:

PRpan1: 141: ...you **cannot enter** to mosque in a miniskirts and uncovered heads **also**... (*also* instead of *either*)

PRpan1: 169: ... there is **nobody** in this room **also** that can judge the faith of the four women that are on the panel...

3.4.5 Indirect speech

In indirect speech constructions, the lack of sequence of tenses is often accompanied by inverted word order instead of straight word order. However, the evaluation of these

examples requires care as in the spoken medium the distinction between direct and indirect speech may not always be straightforward.

EDsed31: 1125: ... there have been done a lot of studies on **what does friendship mean** or **what is a friend** in different cultures and **how many words do you have for a friend** in different cultures... (inverted word order instead of straight word order)

3.5 Category shifts

I have given this name to cases where a word derived from the same stem and representing another category is used instead of the standard one. Adjective instead of adverb (in many cases also a feature of informal English):

EDsed31: 1121: no **total** different

EDsed31: 1134: ... but er we are **complete** different

EDsed31: 1322: ... no matter how **good** you know them....

PRqas18: 46: ...I have to get **especial** Asian students used to this evaluation form.

Adverb instead of adjective:

PRpan1: 41: ...so then we are getting closer to be **equally** to them...

Verb instead of noun:

POprc465: 8: There are some member countries who would like to see the resume of the talks with Serbia only with **approve** by Mr ...'s government they are trying to arrest Mr Mladic.

POprc465: 44: hat's something that really is the best **prove**, I think, that our cooperation with this plan and with further operational plans will be more efficient

3.6 Non-standard lexical forms

3.6.1 Preposition/particle use different from Standard British English

Three cases can be distinguished here. One is that a preposition is missing:

PRqas18: ... and if they **succeed their exams** ... (*in* is missing)

Secondly, there may be an extra preposition:

EDsed31: 1611: ... but if a professor address **at** me

PRpan1: 22: ... I don't want to continue **into** that...

PRpan1: 141: ...you cannot enter **to** mosque in a miniskirts and uncovered heads also...

Thirdly, a different preposition is used in an abundance of examples of which the following is just a selection:

EDint328: 314: I was writing **on** Maltese (Standard: *in*)

EDwgd5: 387: ... and we decided everybody **from** ourselves to write a page or two pages of his or her topic (Standard: *every one of us*)

PBcon594: 135: because **at** everything it's okay you expect more (Standard: *with*)

PBcon594: 177: ...he's looking forward **for** his father to come (Standard: *to + ING-form*)

PRcon29: 150: yes, but the Spanish name of that is not the same **than** English (Standard: *as*)

PRpan1: 22: ...let's start **by** the question of family law.

3.6.2 Other lexical variation

Sometimes, a similar word is substituted for the standard one.

EDsve421: 481: for the Internet **assess**. (instead of *access*)

LEint551: 48: six hundred metre so it's er a **plate** (instead of *plateau*)

PBqas410: 52: I would like to **remember** you once more that there's a registered number of places (instead of *remind*)

PRcon29: 388: an **expertise** in English (instead of *expert*)

PRcon29: 499: the Vienna **major** (instead of *mayor*)

In other cases, collocations or set expressions deviate from standard ones.

EDcon4: 259: they were **talking** really weird stories (instead of *telling*)

PRpan1: 22: ... but what **makes** me at unease... (instead of *puts*)

PRpan1: 112: ...there are people who says that it is at all not **excepted** by Islam to have four wives. (instead of *expected* or *accepted*)

Conclusion

As it can be seen, the pieces of discourse investigated do display grammatical and lexical differences in comparison with Standard British English. However, one should not jump to conclusions about what effect International or Global English may have on the language of

native speakers by birth. Two of the phenomena presented may indicate a tendency to eliminate certain redundancies from the language: the replacement of present perfect forms with simple past and the use of the singular after numerals denoting a number bigger than one.

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